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Press-Gazette Photo

***Holy Martyrs of Gorcum Church***



**Rev. Elroy Reimer**

In 1844, the whole territory of Wisconsin was made into a Diocese by the Catholic Church with the See City at Milwaukee. Bishop Henni, the first Bishop of Milwaukee, appointed Father Smitting to begin missionary work in the Preble and Upper Peninsula Territory in 1858, 10 years before Green Bay became a Diocese.

The first settlers in Preble were Flemish Belgians and some Germans. The Flemish, who were well educated, came directly from Belgium to New York, to Chicago, and then to Preble. Before the township of Preble was organized in 1859, this locality was known as "Faengers." The county road passing in front of the Church was named after Peter Faenger, and later became Finger Road. In fact the Church is

well known in Green Bay as the Finger Road Church.

Peter Faenger was a community leader in politics, business and religion. He frequently led people in prayer on Sundays when a priest could not be present for Mass. Mass was offered in the Faenger home and when his home could no longer accommodate the increasing attendance, the people got together and built a small log church on 10 acres of land donated by Faenger.

In 1867, Father Daems was appointed to care for the Holy Martyrs mission church and he built the first rectory and furnished it. The first resident pastor, Father VanGrootel was appointed in 1869. The small parish grew rapidly and in 1883 the present church was built.

The parishioners built it themselves

with the straight white pine that came from their woods. The huge timbers were hand hewed. Oxen were used to pull the timbers from the woods. In 1921, the church furnace room was excavated and two new furnaces installed. In 1925, the church was wired for electric lights. In 1935, the pipe organ was purchased and installed. In 1940, the church steeple was dismantled and the tower repaired.

In 1943, the church was remodeled. A crucifixion scene on the sanctuary wall, new altars, new stained glass windows, new stations of the cross, asphalt tile floor and lighting fixtures were added. The parish added a hall in 1958 and a new school in 1967.

Further remodeling is currently underway, including redecoration of the interior

and a large entrance addition.

The parish is the only one known in the United States named after the Martyrs of Gorcum, who were nineteen priests from Gorcum, near Dordrecht, Holland, hanged on account of their religion 1572. Their feastday is July 9. The martyrs of Gorcum were canonized in 1867, the year the parish was founded.

The Rev. Elroy Reimer has been the pastor since 1970. A native of Manitowoc, he came to Holy Martyrs after serving his first pastorate at Phlox. Previously, he had been an assistant pastor at Sts. Peter and Paul, Green Bay; St. John, Antigo, and Sacred Heart, Appleton. Reimer was ordained June 1, 1957, after studying at St. Nazianz Salvatorian Seminary and St. Francis Seminary in Milwaukee.